The Biblical Teaching of Hell

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The majority of Christians normally believe that the consequence of sins (if people are not covered by the blood of Christ) is to be burnt in hell for all eternity, while others think sinners will be annihilated in flames of judgment. It may come as a surprise to learn that the Bible nowhere teaches that every unrepentant sinner will burn in hell. It does say there is a lake of fire which will exist at the end of the Millennium (Revelation 20:10), but that does not teach that all present day sinners will be consigned to it. Nor does the Bible say that sinners will live within an inferno for all eternity.

The very opposite is true. The Bible says the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23), not to live for eternity. Everlasting life is a gift from God; it is not something inherent within man (Romans 6:23). What the Bible does show, and shows very clearly, is that the penalty for unforgiven sins is death. God will determine the necessary means by which the deaths of unrepentant sinners will occur. And He will not use fire in every case to bring about such deaths.

Is There Eternal Fire?

It can be shown from biblical examples that hell fire is not eternal and that the penalty for un repentant sin is not to burn in hell forever. Let us look at some modern examples which have a legal basis for punishment associated with them that reflect the judicial sentences for sins or crimes mentioned in the Bible.

Suppose you ran a stop light with your automobile and were apprehended by the police. When brought before the judge, he fined you $50 or five days in jail. The wages of your particular "sin" (in this case) was $50. But let us suppose you had no money in your pocket to pay the fine. If so, you would then be liable to spend the five days in jail.

> "And the judge [shall] deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto you [said Christ], thou shall by no means come out thence, till thou has paid the uttermost farthing."
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> • Against Celsus, 6:26

Every part of the sentence rendered by the judge must be met in full!

However, let us say you had a friend who accompanied you to court and that he had that amount of cash on him. He took the $50 out of his wallet and paid your fine in full. Since he did this for you, you would be able to walk out of the court with your penalty fully met. But only if the complete amount were given to the clerk of the court would you be free. The Bible, as shown in the quote by Christ given above, supports the legitimacy of this example even in the sense of divine judgment. The point is: someone else paid your debt for you, but the person had to pay for your debt to society in full.

Let us now give an example of a more serious crime — say a felony was committed. The judge might say the wages of such a "sin" is twenty years in prison. In this case it would not be possible in our Western courts for some friend to take your place and go to prison for you (nor would a simple monetary fine be allowable), but the theological teaching of the Bible would permit a person to take your place. This may seem absurd on the surface, but it is nevertheless true. The Bible, in the matter of paying the penalty for sins against the Deity [not, however, against man], allows for vicarious payment. That is what the law of offering animals for sins was all about. The animal paid the penalty (in a symbolic way) instead of the person (Leviticus 16:30, 34). This, of course, would not be sanctioned in our modern courts, but suppose the judge said "twenty years" and a person were legally able to represent the felon. If so, the substitute would have to meet the full penalty of the law, "until the uttermost farthing be paid."

Let us now go a step beyond the example of a felony and say a person had committed the crime of murder. The judge might then say the wages of such a "sin" was death in the electric chair. Again, our modern courts would not allow a person to take another's place in the punishment, but the Bible authorizes such things from a theological point of view. As a matter of fact, this is exactly what Christ did for each of us. He died for us — in our place. The wages of sin (our sins) is death, and that is precisely what Christ did for us. "In due time Christ died for the ungodly" (Romans 5:6). Christ paid the exact and full penalty which all people have accrued to themselves because of their sins. The punishment is death.